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**STATEMENT BY MR. ANVAR AZIMOV,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

21 June 2010

In response to the address by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia

Mr. Chairperson,

We warmly welcome you, Mr. Minister, to this meeting of the Permanent Council and thank you for your detailed statement.

We commend the process of internal reforms being carried out by the Serb leadership. The dynamic transformations taking place in Serbia are not only evidence of the high level of the country's democratic development but also make a significant contribution to the strengthening of stability and security in the western Balkans.

We should like to mention in particular the achievements as regards the protection of the rights of national communities, notably the law on national minorities approved last year and the elections held on 6 June to the Council of National Minorities. The efforts in this sphere are helping to make the creation of a genuinely inter-ethnic society a reality.

We should also like to single out the measures being taken by Belgrade to resolve a burning issue in the region, namely the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to the places where they used to live and the restoration of their rights. We welcome the interministerial conference held on this subject at the initiative of the Serb authorities on 25 March. We trust that its results will help to secure progress in the resolution of this long-standing issue. We firmly believe that transborder questions of this kind need to be resolved through regional efforts on the basis of joint action by the OSCE missions deployed in the western Balkans and with the involvement of the expertise of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Distinguished Foreign Minister,

We fully share your assessments of the current situation in Kosovo. Relations remain deadlocked in the fundamental sphere of inter-ethnic relations. It is clear that there has been virtually zero progress in overcoming the deep-seated conflicts between the Serb and Albanian communities.

A source of particular concern is the desire by the self-proclaimed “authorities” of Kosovo to implement at any price the so-called “strategy for northern Kosovo” aimed at the forceful expulsion of local power structures from Serb populated districts. It is evident that in Pristina, and indeed in the OSCE participating States, those in favour of forcing through this scenario fail to realize that unilateral actions in this area have serious potential for conflict and may result in a new round of inter-ethnic confrontation likely to seriously destabilize the entire region.

We are concerned at the absence of preventive measures and a proper response on the part of the international presences, notably the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, to acts of vandalism by Kosovo Albanians in dismantling mobile communication transmitters in areas with a high number of Serb communities. Restrictions are being introduced as regards the entry of Serb citizens into the territory of Kosovo, without any reaction from international representatives. We believe there is a need for a legal and political assessment of these actions by Pristina. Otherwise, the Kosovo Albanians will be convinced of their impunity and continue to take such irresponsible steps.

Essentially, there is no progress either with respect to the return of refugees and internally displaced persons. The basic conditions for their security are absent, as are housing, employment and medical services. The countless cases of Kosovo Serbs being forced to sell their property and leave the territory receive no attention. The territory of the major Serb enclaves is gradually being reduced, whereas the smaller ones are actually dying out.

Considerable problems remain as regards the protection of the Serbian Orthodox and cultural heritage. A recent report by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the Security Council once again mentioned numerous cases of vandalism at Serb holy sites. The fact that the Kosovo Force has begun to transfer responsibility for the protection of important Serb heritage sites to the Kosovo police is a matter of concern. We all remember from a recent report by the OSCE Mission in Kosovo the armed attack on Serb refugees in the village of Zac, which the Kosovo police were unable to prevent.

Mr. Chairperson,
Mr. Minister,

Expectations that the self-proclamation of Kosovo’s “sovereignty” would accelerate the reaching of a solution acceptable to all parties have proven to be unfounded. The “independence” of the territory has merely complicated the already difficult situation in the region, spurring on extremist attitudes in neighbouring countries and indeed in the world as a whole.

We are convinced that in the current circumstances it is necessary to adhere strictly to the spirit and letter of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244, which remains fully in force. It continues to be the basis under international law, binding on all parties, for a Kosovo settlement and for ensuring the security of the territory. Any actions in circumvention of that resolution are a manifestation of blatant disrespect for international law.

We should like to point out in particular that there is no alternative to preserving the leading role of the United Nations in the Kosovo process. This is a position that Russia intends to maintain in the future as well. The Security Council and the United Nations

Mission are indispensable in ensuring international oversight of the situation in the territory, which continues to be extremely fragile.

We might recall that in accordance with the “package” approach to the reconfiguration of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) on the basis of the results of the meeting of the United Nations Security Council in November 2008, all international factors in the territory, including the OSCE Mission, must operate within the framework of the law as set out in resolution 1244. No one has the right to obstruct the implementation of the task of helping to ensure the rights and security of the national communities, preserve the Serb cultural and religious heritage, and ensure the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to the places where they used to live. Relations between UNMIK and the missions of the European Union and the OSCE must be developed on this basis.

The continuing difficult situation in Kosovo confirms the illegality and hopelessness of unilateral actions, which can in no way be regarded as a settlement. It is our hope that the International Court of Justice will take full account of this fact when it pronounces its advisory opinion.

We should like to stress in particular that Belgrade’s policy on the Kosovo question remains peaceful and non-confrontational. We completely support the effort to continue the political process with a view to arriving at a legally correct and just solution to the problem of this territory.

Thank you for your attention.